

Numbers 31:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of women that had not known man by lying with him.

Analysis

And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of women that had not known man by lying with him—32,000 virgin females (nashim asher lo yad'u mishkav zakar) sparks difficult ethical questions. Deuteronomy 20:14 permits taking women/children as spoils; adult males were executed (31:7,17) along with non-virgin females (31:17) due to their role in Baal-Peor seduction (Numbers 25).

These captives weren't sex slaves but became integrated into Israel as servants, eventually eligible for covenant membership. The virginity specification prevented bringing idolatrous influence into the camp. Modern readers struggle with this; ancient context shows restrained judgment compared to typical ancient warfare (total annihilation). Still, the passage confronts us with OT holy war's severity, pointing toward Christ who conquers through suffering love, not military force (Revelation 5:5-6).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern warfare typically killed or enslaved entire populations. Israel's selective preservation of virgins (those uninvolved in Baal-Peor apostasy, Numbers 25:1-9) represented judicial discrimination, not ethnic genocide. Numbers 31:18 specifies 'keep alive for yourselves,' suggesting domestic service, potential marriage (cf. Deuteronomy 21:10-14 regulations), or adoption into tribes.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How do we reconcile God's commanded severity in OT holy war with Jesus's enemy-love ethic in the NT?
2. What does the virginity criterion teach about protecting covenant community from corrupting influences?

Interlinear Text

persons	H120	of women	H834	that had not known	by lying
H5315	H4480	H802	H3808	H3045	H4904

man	in all	persons	and two	And thirty	thousand
H2145	H3605	H5315	H8147	H7970	H505

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